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Article

'Come, Follow Me', The Sacralising of the Home, and The Guardian of the Family: How Do European Women Negotiate the Domestic Space in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints?

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Abstract: In October 2018, the Prophet Russell M. Nelson informed members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that the Church teaching curriculum would shift focus away from lessons taught on Sunday. Instead, members were now asked to engage with 'home-centred, church-supported' religious instruction using the Church materials 'Come, Follow Me'. In a religion where Church leaders still defend the idealised family structure of a stay-at-home mother and a father as the provider, the renewed emphasis on the domestic sphere as the site for Church teaching could also reinforce traditional Mormon gender roles. This article draws upon the lived religion of Latter-day Saint women in Sweden, Greece and England to understand how they negotiate gender in their homes. Looking at the implementation of 'Come, Follow Me' of sacralising of the home as a gendered practice, there appears to be a reinforcing of the primacy of the domestic space in the reproduction of religious practices and doctrinal instruction. Simultaneously, in conceptualising a gender role, the guardian of the family, I show the ways that European Latter-day Saint women are providing, protecting and nurturing their families. The domestic space then becomes instrumental in providing space for more nuanced, complex gender constructs that accommodate Mormon beliefs, cultural context and secular notions of gender without destabilising the institutional structure.

Keywords: Mormonism; gender; lived religion; regional practices; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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1. Introduction

Religious institutions, practices and creed are instrumental in how gendered identities are constructed in private spaces, congregations, workplaces and the wider community, even more so in traditional Christian communities where women are arguably subject to greater gender inequality through patriarchal institutional structures and androcentric religious dogma (Keysar 2014; Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012). In the case of women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church teachings promote the uniformity of gender construction (Sumerau and Cragun 2015), suggesting that Mormon construction of gender reproduces homogeneity between women while making it difficult for members to express diverse forms of gender in congregational spaces (Petrey 2020). As Church initiatives have shifted towards a more 'home-centred, church-supported' worship, this article draws upon the lived experiences of Latter-day Saint women in Greece, Sweden and England to gain insights into gender negotiations in the home. By offering a more expansive depiction of the daily practices of Latter-day Saint women, I show that at times negotiating religion, gender and cultural norms can mean they are de-emphasising Church institutional ideals of gender. By questioning the uniformity in experience between Latter-day Saint women broadens the understanding of gender constructs, roles, and practices and recognises expansive expressions of gendered religious lives.

To start, I will contextualise the dominant narratives around gender and cultural practices (Mormon or otherwise) by locating the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

in the European landscape. I then discuss the extent to which implementing 'Come, Follow Me' is a 'sacralising of the home'. Sacralising of the home is a conceptualisation of how Mormon women in their everyday practices can create spaces that are simultaneously secular and sacred. Meredith McGuire (2008, p. 13) sees lived religion as 'embodied practices', the way religious people translate doctrine into material reality through bodies, the 'doing' of religion, as well as the social meaning attached to practices. Therefore, studying the lived practices of religious individuals gives insights into how they engage with the wider community to construct everyday actions that make sense of their religious and cultural context (Ammerman 2014; Harvey 2013; Orsi 2003). By looking at participants lived religion, I show the negotiations between Church teachings and host cultural norms that manifest as embodied practices can contest certain Mormon gender practices without destabilising the institutional structure. I then suggest a new gender role, guardian of the family, which is a gender role where European Latter-day Saint women are re-interpreting conservative Mormon gender roles to claim that providing for *and* nurturing their families is consistent with Church teachings. Finally, I argue that looking at the contradictions and compromises found in lived religion gives insights into how challenges and compliance to official religious teachings on gender are found in European Latter-day Saint lives.

Caveat: Since 2018, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has requested that Mormon or LDS no longer be used and be replaced by the Latter-day Saints or shortened to the Church. In this article, I will draw upon all forms. One reason for my continuing use of Mormon, alongside LDS, Latter-day Saints and the Church is to acknowledge how participants encounter and understand Mormon and Mormonism as religious affiliation and a discrete location, culture, history and practices. Another reason is participants mobilising against Church-taught gender roles saw it as challenging Mormonism rather than acting against 'the restored gospel of Jesus Christ'. Moreover, the research was conducted six months after the announcement, when participants still referred to themselves as Mormons and were ambivalent towards the removal of a moniker that had for so long defined their religious identity.

2. Methodology and Methods

As the production of most knowledge emerges from located experiences (Smith 1987), as a white, active member of the Mormon community in Britain, my positionality informs my assumptions about gender and power in the Church, as well as my understanding of Mormon doctrine. Embodiment is central to the study of religion as it considers how individual bodies connect with the material reality of religious belief (Page and Pilcher 2020). In addition, the study of lived religion does not produce extensive generalisable data but offers instead vibrant, granular snapshots to show how beliefs transform into the way we live (Harvey 2013).

The methodology and methods for this study had to accommodate how knowledge is partial, socially situated, and grounded in experiences and differences (Smith 1987). Rather than draw upon more traditional qualitative methods, such as interviews, I choose Photovoice, a participatory framework that could position participants as co-producers of knowledge. Photovoice as a method entails the researcher asking participants to take photographs of everyday items that they feel are pertinent to the research topic and then share their images in a group setting (Milne and Muir 2019). Although photovoice is found in the fields of education, disability studies and public health as a tool for working with marginalised communities, it is still finding space in the sociology of religion. Yet, religion is dominated by visual narratives that transform devout beliefs into expressions of lived practices. Photovoice has often be used 'by and with women instead of on women, in ways that empower people, honour women's intelligence, and value knowledge grounded in experience' (Wang and Burris 1997, p. 74). As participants use photos to explore for themselves representation, the method not only addresses the power asymmetry within the research process (particularly when working with diverse cultural standpoints) but

shifts the discourse towards a more inclusive co-construction of knowledge (Wang and Burris 1997).

The research was conducted over a period of four months, from the end of December 2018–March 2019. Unlike quantitative research that is guided by statistics-based rules, sampling in qualitative research will depend on the research design or thematic saturation (the point where no new themes or data is produced), which some scholars suggest should be nine interviews or more (Vasileiou et al. 2018). Similarly, the recommended sample size for photovoice is not more than ten people(Sutton-Brown 2014). Restricting the number of participants allows enough time for each participant to talk about their photographs during the group discussions (Catalani and Minkler 2010). With that consideration in mind, the sample size was fourteen Latter-day Saint women between the ages of 26 and 83 years old: four living in Greece, six from Bradford, England and four from Gothenburg, Sweden. In the absence of a substantive body of work on post-millennial European Latter-day Saint women, or for that matter, research on the 'Come, Follow Me' programme, this research aimed to gather information-rich data that identified potential themes that could be explored larger scale at a later date. Photovoice is a robust academic method, but I recognise the limitations of the findings in choosing to work with a small sample. However, after critical reflexivity on the implications of choosing photovoice as the research method, I feel that photovoice was appropriate for the level of analysis I sought and could also respect and make explicit the nuances of meanings.

The criteria for participation in the study was a self-identification as an active member of the Church, meaning they attended Church at least monthly. The participants living in Greece were converts bar one, while participants in Sweden and England were all from families that had joined the Church before they were born. Recruitment was through a gatekeeper, who used snowball sampling to engage other participants. The sample was an over-representation of white married women, partly due to the lack of diversity of the wards attended by the women in England and Sweden and partly reflective of the difficulties in recruiting and engaging single women in the research.

Before the fieldwork was conducted, and after briefing participants via digital platforms, the participants were asked to submit to me two photographs of items or places they considered representative of Mormonism and Gospel Culture. In response to concerns about confidentiality, no photographs were taken of recognisable places or identifiable people. An ongoing conversation about ethical processes, including reflecting on the potential harm participants may encounter if named, is central to best practice when working with women (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002). After discussion with the participants, I decided to anonymise the findings and not disclose the location of the branch/ward the women attended to protect their identity. The fieldwork saw me gather data by facilitating three focus groups in total, one in each country, with a translator for groups in Sweden and Greece. The purpose of the focus groups was for participants to share their photos and share directly with each other what their pictures expressed about their lives, concerns and experiences. The discussions lasted on average three hours and were recorded and transcribed. The data was thematically analysed to capture and categorise experiences and meanings (Braun and Clarke 2012).

3. The European Religious Landscape.

Like all religious identities, the Mormon identity is shaped by historical and cultural context. Before exploring how the European Latter-day Saint women negotiate gender in the domestic space, I will locate the Church in the European religious landscape. Gaining a broader understanding of what it means to be a Mormon woman in England, Sweden, and Greece foregrounds later discussions on how some European Mormon women shape social constructions of gender in private spaces.

A Christian state religion often dominates the European religious marketplace. In Greece, Sweden and the UK, state religions emerge from different Christianity strands, resulting in diverse religious traditions and levels of affiliations. In Greece, the state

religion is Greek Orthodox, with around 38% of the population claiming they attend worship services at least monthly (European Commission 2019). Over half of Greek adults describe themselves as highly religious. As do many Central and Eastern Europeans, Greeks identify as more religious than Western European (Evans and Baronavski 2018). Although still symbolically privileged, state churches are reduced in influence and status in many countries in Western Europe, with declining attendance reflecting what has been claimed as religious indifference (Bruce 2013). One in ten people in Lutheran Sweden and the United Kingdom, with an Anglican state church, consider themselves highly religious. Only 11% of Swedes and 20% of the UK say they attend worship services at least monthly (Evans and Baronavski 2018).

Europe is shifting towards greater secularity, and along with the increasing visibility of non-western religions, the European religious landscape could be described as post-Christian (Magazzini et al. 2020). Yet, 'in the historical processes of European secularization, the religious and the secular are inextricably bound together and mutually condition each other' (Casanova 2007, p. 101). According to Joan Scott (2018), the Age of Enlightenment allowed men, rather than a church, to monopolise the public space, causing religion to retreat into the domestic space. The legacy of these political shifts is an association of religion with the domestic space, which is seen as irrational, unreasonable, emotional and feminised, whilst secularity and the public space are framed as rational, reasonable, measured and masculine (Nyhagen 2018). The feminisation of religion was purposeful. It permitted secularity to act as a tool to disempower both women and religion while maintaining patriarchal structures in religious and secular institutions (Scott 2018). Concurrently, increased secularity in some European countries de-privileged the state-religion connexions and facilitated an acceptance of greater religious diversity, including transforming previously stigmatised religions from sect to church (Beck 2010).

To a degree, in Western Europe, Mormonism has benefited from the de facto decoupling of religion from the state and the growth of religious pluralism. Still, it remains a marginalised religious community in some parts of Central and Eastern Europe (Stewart and Martinich 2020). In Greece, although the first baptisms were in 1905, the Church has only had an official presence since the 1960s. In 2019, roughly 1 in 13,427 Greeks were members (less than 0.0074% of the population). In comparison, in Sweden, the Church has been established since 1850, and the membership is in the region of 1 in 1228 (0.08%). In the United Kingdom, where the first Mormon missionaries arrived in 1837 and which sees some of the oldest continuous Latter-day Saint congregations, membership is 1 in 347, or 0.29% of the population (Stewart and Martinich 2020).

In addition to varying religious affiliation and engagement, Greece, Sweden, and the UK vary in women's access to opportunities. According to the World Economic Forum (2021, p. 9) 'Global Gender Gap Index', which tracks global progress on 'relative gaps between women and men on health, education, economy and politics', Sweden is 5th, United Kingdom 23rd, and Greece is 98th in the rankings (the USA is 30th). Based on GGP findings, Western Europe is predicted to close the gender gap in 52.1 years, followed by North America (62.5 years). With a difference in gender equality between European countries and between Europe and the USA, it is not unexpected that European Latter-day Saint women construct gender norms that are more reflective of the women's own countries culture rather than what they see as American Church traditions (Decoo-Van Welkenhuysen 2016).

European latter-day Saint members find ways to 'strengthen' allegiance to the Church whilst 'loosening' the influence of an American-based religion (Decoo 2013). The religious emancipation by migrants from Europe on arrival in the United States of America in the 1600s facilitated uniquely American-centric new religious movements, such as Mormonism, a religion 'born in the United States only a generation following the birth of the nation itself' (Barlow 2012, p. 55). In light of LDS doctrine claiming America as a 'new Jerusalem' (Article of Faiths 10), the Church's role in colonising parts of America, and Utah's privileged access to cultural capital and institutional power, Mormonism arguably will always

appear to be shaped by American exceptionalism (Decoo 2013; Van Beek 2005). If Americans (or in particular Utah) have greater influence and presence in Church structures, they will have greater control over and access to the discourse, including how gender is understood, constructed and found in practices. Therefore, any discussion about gender and Mormonism will necessitate an insight into how American exceptionalism or rather Utah exceptionalism informs the discourse.

4. Come, Follow Me: The Sacralising of the Home?

Mormon religious education programmes, such as Sunday School, are centralised, universally correlated systems, where every congregation is taught from the same manuals worldwide (Phillips 2008). In standardising teachings, Church leaders contend that it promotes a uniform gospel culture with 'a set of values and expectations and practices common to all members' (Oaks 2012). In 2018 the recently called LDS Prophet Russell M. Nelson announced the implementation of 'Come, Follow Me', a series of learning resources that shifted away from formal Sunday structures to a 'home-centred, Church-supported integrated curriculum . . . to transform the home into a sanctuary of faith' (Nelson 2018, para 2). The 'Come, Follow Me' programme is a set of study guides that members are encouraged to use in their homes daily, which aims to improve not only scriptural knowledge but also practical application of the doctrine. The new curriculum now frames Sunday meetings as additional support to studying the scriptures, with the home central to religious instruction (Church News 2018). The institutional move away from formal structured Sunday lessons to members learning and teaching about Mormon doctrine in the home makes the domestic space the focus of religious knowledge production.

When asked about the impact of the Church re-positioning the home as central to the reproduction of religious practices *and* doctrinal instruction, participants felt it reflected how they see their faith as inherently bound to the minutia of mundane acts within homes. Verity and Lydia, who were married to active members of the Church and were full-time homemakers, found implementing 'Come, Follow Me' was influential in them feeling more agential in how they constructed their faith. In sharing her photography of how she saw Mormonism as a tightly arranged bouquet, Verity commented that 'Come, Follow Me' was emancipating how she encountered her faith. She felt that the programme was part of the Church efforts to build a gospel culture, which her image represented as a field of flowers:

> With the new 'Come, Follow Me' curriculum, I think the bouquet is being untied a little bit. Before the 3-hour block, I knew we would read things and do our scriptures at home, but it was like that was the classroom you went to and where we did all the majority of our learning. With Come, Follow Me, I feel like it has given me a lot more ownership of what I learn and what I teach my family. It is helping from the transition from Mormon culture to the gospel culture.
>
> (Verity, 2nd generation LDS, 34 years old, England)

Likewise, Lydia felt that the new programme challenged previously performative Mormonism as she felt her focus had been on how her family were perceived during Sunday worship:

> I do believe 'Come, Follow Me' makes a big difference, and I definitely think it is really inspired in terms that it makes me look less at what performance I am putting on a Sunday and more at what am I doing at home, which no one sees and only really matters to my family and me. For periods, I have gone to Church, and everyone thinks I am great, doing everything I should be but actually, I am not reading my scriptures all week, and I have not been praying, but no one knows that. Now I am a lot more conscious of keeping up with those things. I am not perfect, I am still not doing very well, but I am better. It still feels like more of a striving, but I feel like more trust has been placed in me; I feel more responsible for myself and my family.
>
> (Lydia, 2nd generation LDS, 35 years old, England)

In making the home central to formal and informal religious instruction, 'Come, Follow Me' has the potential for European Mormon women to sacralise the home. Francesca Montemaggi (2015, p. 2) contends sacralisation is the process 'whereby individual religious actors bestow value to ideas and practices and recognise them as a legitimate part of tradition'. Sacralisation is 'the cult of the individual' (Casanova 2012, p. 460) or how religious people construct lived practices and claim them as authorised forms of worship. Rather than being religiously deterministic, sacralisation produces practices that may or may not reflect official teachings as the process entails interpretation of doctrine informed by social, gender and cultural location. Therefore, when talking about the sacralisation of the home, I am proposing a range of embodied practices, as in the way participants 'do' religion and gender every day (Page and Pilcher 2020), but which are ascribed by the participant as Mormon practices.

The domestic space is where the intersection between gender and religion is more fully formed (Franzmann 2000). Line Nyhagen (2017) notes in Europe simplified framings of religion as feminine and private and secularism as masculine and public have disregarded how the domestic space is political. In reclaiming the home as an authoritative religious structure, this could see some European Latter-day Saint women addressing a lack of visible power (the Priesthood) through hidden and invisible strategies, including the freedom to conceptualise a gospel culture that develops a relationship with God directly rather than dictated by male authority. Men and women in conservative religions, such as Mormonism, are expected to embrace male leadership and find ways to rationalise male authority to exclude women from positions of organisational power (Leamaster and Bautista 2018). One such way is how Church leaders draw upon complementarianism that is also found in other Abrahamic tradition religions, to inform: 'For divine purposes, male and female spirits are different, distinctive, and complementary. The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females were needed to implement the plan of happiness' (Bednar 2006). Yet, Swedish participants saw institutional Mormonism as complicit in rigidly enforcing a homogenised collective commitment to prescribed gender roles that they felt were alien to their host culture:

> It is a very American church that clashes with the Swedish culture. One of the biggest things is how men and women in Church are seen. In Sweden, it feels we are super equal, but we come into the Church is feels old-fashioned that it is ok for women to be in the kitchen. When you listen to talks from American leaders, it seems that it is ok there, but in Sweden, it is not like this; that is not ok.
>
> (Astrid, 3rd generation LDS, 31 years old, Sweden)

The expectation that men and women are to share religious teaching in the home could combat traditional or patriarchal notions of masculinity that men are more suited to authority or women are more feeling-driven in decision-making. In suggesting that implementing 'Come, Follow Me' could offer opportunities for greater equality (spiritual or otherwise) in the home between men and women, I do not claim this automatically circumnavigates structural Mormon male leadership with its systemic androcentric governance. More likely, 'Come, Follow Me' as a programme will reinforce what Loire Stromberg (2004, p. 60) sees as 'charismatic power', where Mormon women have a superficial appearance of authority. Still, they have little or no ability to lead the administration of the Church on a local, regional, or global level. Denied the visibility of male priesthood authority, Mormon women are deprived of positional power.

Potentially, as 'Come, Follow Me' empowers members to be their own spiritual authorities, lived religion could construct Mormon practices that reflect local cultural context (including gender norms) and Church doctrine. Although the Church claims its programs and administration are promoting a gospel culture, for members outside of North America, the Church often represents 'not an international universal church we claim to be, but an American Church universally translated' (Ventura 1988, p. 141). Until Church leaders de-centralise rituals, symbols and church materials and have greater diversity in leadership, Elena feels that the Church structure reflects American norms:

> What gives the Church its predominant American character is that the meaning is very American, and the communication tools (language and expressions) we use are American. Language is a key factor as it carries all the deep and difficult meanings of religious topics. Although the Church has expanded in so many countries and most of the members reside outside the USA, this is not reflected in the Church's Authorities, where we count very few non-USA members . . . I would only appoint mission presidents who know very well the places they go to serve and not just brilliant people with good intentions. The leaders in each mission should understand the culture, history, and traditions of the people, the region's politics, the economic situation. Actually, my opinion is that the Church will grow in a country only when local people take it into their hands.
>
> (Elena, 1st generation LDS/convert, 52 years old, Greece)

If 'Come, Follow Me' resources are overseen through a singular cultural, racial, gender lens, i.e., white Church male leaders based in America, this will limit the representation of broader narratives. Therefore, whilst Louise, whose husband was a Church leader, saw 'Come, Follow Me' resources as instrumental in aiding her efforts to make the domestic space into a sacred sphere: 'I am seeing more and more videos, articles and resources to share in our family and that is just making a big difference to the spirituality in our home life' (Louise, 3rd generation, 26 years old, England). Rowena felt these very same resources were reinforcing idealised Utah families, which failed to represent their lived experiences:

> So, we are being told to do 'Come, Follow Me' at home and that it is going to work out for everybody, but those people in Utah have the perfect families. Whereas I have got two teenagers and a husband that's inactive fighting against me. I have not managed to get my family down to do a 'Come, Follow Me' lesson because three of them do not want to be there. I have just had to look at it on my own - just because that is working there [Utah] does not mean it applies to everywhere.
>
> (Rowena, 2nd generation LDS, 33 years old, England)

For Rowena, Church produced resources highlight the gap between her family dynamics and the way the institutional Church frames families in the domestic sphere. Religious beliefs are shaped through daily actions such as how we talk, what we wear, and how we engage in social interactions (McGuire 2008). Similarly, gender is constructed at the individual level, the interactional level, and the institutional level (Wharton 2012). Gender is best understood as socially constructed through interactions, cultural norms, and historical narratives projected onto a sexed body (Bradley 2013; Connell and Pearse 2015; King 1995; Scott 1986). Mormon gender constructs are connected to cultural context and its own history, doctrine and traditions (Petrey 2020). Therefore, in a decidedly American religion (Mason 2016; Rutherford 2016), correspondingly, European Mormon women will encounter Church gender constructs informed by white traditional American religious traditions that are presented as universal.

In contending biological essentialism as the base for gender scripts and male/female embodiment as separate distinctive functions divinely commissioned by God, Mormon teachings have much in common with other North American traditional religious communities (Bartkowski 2001; Dworkin 1983; Gallagher 2004; Seneviratne and Currie 2001; Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012). Early European Victorian social observers on America noted that white American mainstream attitudes held rigid distinctions between men and women's roles and characters (De Tocqueville [1840] 2002). Robin Bunce (2017) suggests that as a result of this historical positioning of gender, American Christian right churches are the foremost advocates of complementarianism. If that is the case, that 1800s American societal norms produced and reproduced exaggerated gender divides, then it is not unexpected that a Church that emerged from that milieu would internalise those social constructs of gender.

Previous studies on British and Irish members have shown that some members are challenging Utah as the paradigm of Latter-day Saint congregations to offset the

power imbalance between Utah congregations and the rest of the world (Halford 2020; O'Brien 2020). In discussions about Mormonism, participants saw Utah as symbolic and synonymous with Church culture. Utah is best understood as a 'Mormon culture region' and located within a 'situation of power' (Yorgason 2003, p. 18), meaning that members position themselves in relation to Utah Mormon practices. The early Church framing of Utah as the model of Mormonism resulted in hierarchies that continue to produce ideals of gender, race, sexuality, class, religion, and bodies in Europe (Decoo 2013; Maffly-Kipp 2020). As Emily's comments show below, on seeing 'Come, Follow Me' videos, she felt deficit when she compared and contrasted her lived practices against what she saw as a Utah Church model:

> Very, very, Utah, and it just seems like those images then stick in our minds because that is all we are thinking when we are watching the video about Come, Follow Me. I mean, I think why does my family not look like this? Maybe not even consciously, but we are left feeling like we are not doing 'Come, Follow Me' properly because family study does not look like the Church video family study'.
>
> (Emily, 3rd generation LDS, 38 years old, England)

Emily may have internalised a Church hierarchy, according to which she perceives Utah families as the epitome of Mormon families, but she also critiqued notions of a 'perfect Utah woman'. In discussing her photo of gospel culture, which was a home in disarray, while her image of Mormon culture was of an immaculate room, she commented 'I was thinking this morning when everything was going to pot, and I was crying before half-past seven, I was so glad I was not a Mormon in Utah. I feel the same Mormon culture here but to a much, much, much lesser degree' (ibid). Emily was not alone in claiming dissonance between herself and Utah women; Swedish participants are also reconfiguring Utah Mormon women as the anomaly regarding gendered norms.

In previous research on British Latter-day Saints, participants would ascribe a distorted representation of Mormon gender to 'it's a Utah thing', associating it with the highest female leadership in the Church, the General Relief Society, Young Women and Primary Presidencies (Halford 2020, p. 395). Similarly, the English and Swedish women in this study regard General Female Presidencies with less respect than high-level male authority and in some cases actively resisted receiving counsel from Utah female leaders: 'The thing is the women leaders are all American; there is no difference between them, they seem all the same' (Clara, 2nd generation LDS, 33 years old, Sweden). While Annie thought: 'When they [female leaders] stand up, you feel a bit alienated, you feel like they are not a normal woman speaking' (Annie, 3rd generation LDS, 30 years old, England). With the recent expansion of general leadership roles that saw 50 women called as International Area Organisation Advisers, with six European women assigned to represent Europe (Toone 2021), this perception of female Church leaders may alter in time. Until then, English and Swedish participants appear to mobilise against what they see as Utah Mormon gender constructs and claim, instead, that they are negotiating gender that reflects gospel culture.

In contrast, Greek women also framed Utah Mormon women as an anomaly, but they perceived Utah Latter-day Saint women as religiously advantaged, insulated from the concerns and challenges they and other members outside of America encountered in living the gospel. The two largest branches in Greece cover the same area, but Greek speakers meet in one branch, and English speakers meet in another that Sofia calls the difference 'between heaven and hell' (ibid). Comparing themselves to Utah LDS female embodiment, Greek participants see themselves as 'second-rate', with their main critique of Church female leaders is 'that we are forgotten by the worldwide leaders' (Athena, 1st generation/convert, 83 years old, widow, Greece). Sofia also frames Greek male leaders as less able than American male leaders who are seen as exemplars of masculine Latter-day Saint roles: 'We are told to respect the priesthood but the [local] priesthood they don't always respect us and what we do, they do not use their priesthood' (Sofia, 1st generation/convert, married, Greece). Why Greek participants view American Latter-day Saint women more positively as role models, while Swedish and English participants were much more circumspect

towards them could reflect how the UK and Sweden have progressed further towards gender equality, making them more aware of and more confident in challenging gender inequality and prescriptive gender roles.

Rather than destabilising the institutional structure by introducing contested identities, participants construct gender as a series of negotiations that see individuals bring together religious doctrine and lived practices to be transformed into material reality (Ross et al. 2015). For example, Swedish and English participants filter what they see as Utah (Mormonism) from what they understand as the gospel (pure religion) to construct gender practices and conceptualise gender roles. The sacralising of the home then becomes what Michael Curry (1999, p. 102) calls 'that's what we do here', meaning that participants are drawing together region and place to produce contextual social and cultural practices through which subjectivities are performed. Therefore, resistance to traditional Mormon gender roles occurs if there is a broader societal expectation of gender equality and expansive faith beliefs to produce complex, nuanced gender negotiations.

5. Guardian of the Family

Gender as a social construct recognises how the category of woman is discursively produced with masculine and feminine seen as unstable categories formed and informed in a particular time, place, and context and not necessarily related in any clear way to bodies (Butler 2011; Connell and Pearse 2015). In contrast, the Church's official position is that gender is a fixed, stable identity (Benson 1987). Yet, when looking at how Church leaders taught gender in authorised sermons, literature and media outlets since the 1970s, Sumerau and Cragun (2015) found whilst there was boundary work to maintain gender difference, gender was also framed as divinely designed difference. Taylor Petrey (2020) contends that Mormon teachings reinforce the importance of gender difference, suggesting that leaders are aware that 'gender is a fluid concept that must be secured and produced through strong ecclesiastical legal, and cultural norms' (p. 15). For example, one of the most important Mormon texts on gender is 'The Family: A Proclamation to the World' (1995), states that: 'gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose' (1995: para 2), yet, there is also advice on how members are to perform masculinity/maleness and femininity/femaleness (Allred 2015; Petersen 2015). In doing so, the family proclamation is ratifying a heterosexual dominant-submissive paradigm for family relationships that maintains women as an appendage rather than equal to men (Hoyt 2007; Kline 2016; Leamaster and Einwohner 2017; Miles 2006; Toscano 2007).

'Come, Follow Me' gives women the ability to create spaces that are simultaneously secular and sacred through lived religious practices that work towards sacralising the home. The domestic space for participants then became an intersection between private and public, sacred and secular where gospel principles are formed into lived practices that allow Mormons to function in the wider community: 'So, we may be sisters in faith (and that says a lot about us), but we don't stop being citizens of our country and members of our society' (Elena, 1st generation/convert, 52 years old, Greece). Suppose the domestic space through 'Come, Follow Me' is becoming a religious structure. In that case, Latter-day Saint women can negotiate gender ideals that contest Mormon gender stereotypes without destabilising the institutional structure. Likewise, as lived religion is a series of contested, unstable and creative practices, emerging from those negotiations are new gender roles that are culturally linked and contextually situated. I have conceptualised this gender role as guardian of the family, where religious and societal norms collide to produce relationships, practices, and ways of thinking that inform gender.

The role of guardian of the family recognises intersectionality, how gender, race, sexuality, health conditions, and social location interconnect with different social hierarchies to either marginalise or privilege particular actors and voices in society (Crenshaw 1989; Staunaes and Søndergaard 2011). The guardian of the family is less concerned with maintaining the status quo and more with how some participants are re-imagining Church norms of discrete roles for men and women in lived practices. This gendered role also

informs how European Latter-day Saint women understand motherhood and mothering as protecting and presiding as well as more traditional notions of care. For some participants, the prophetic counsel that 'home is the centre from which woman rules the world' (McKay 1947, p. 641) does not mean they should be restricted to the domestic sphere or their children should be expected to adopt the same role: 'I have been fine with the church roles as I always wanted to have kids and get married, so I have never been conflicted between what the Church says and what I have done. Now I am older, I realise that it is not for everyone, and I am more inclined to teach my daughter that she doesn't have to take the same role that I did' (Linnea, 2nd generation LDS, 33 years old, Sweden). As a gender role, guardian of the family is about taking responsibility for their wellbeing as well as their families in lived practices, such as making choices about whether to have children or not, to leave or remain in the workplace, and the allocation of domestic labour in the home. Guardianship does not mean that the role of wife and mother are devalued, but that the role evolves to reflect changes in life patterns.

A common theme between the participants is their understanding that home is instrumental in organising knowledge, practices and socialisation that reinforce religious convictions. For example, in choosing her kitchen table to photograph, Annie saw it as central to developing close familial ties, where her family can eat, laugh and learn about each other and the gospel:

> This is our dining table, which to me represents gospel principles because I figured most of the time I spend with my children is at the table. It is where we always say our prayers and sit and have our meal and where we are most grateful. We have all our conversations here-we do our good news and bad news, chat about our day. I really love cooking; it is a show of love for me, so the table is just where everything I feel is the most family centred, where I do the most teaching and where I am trying my best to shape them into all sorts of good habits. So, I picked it because when I think about the gospel, it is about family, and it is about learning and evolving as a person. I just think that this is the best time I do the teaching, and it is my favourite time.
>
> (Annie, 3rd generation LDS, 30 years old, England)

For Annie, the domestic space becomes a platform to construct and implement her understanding of piety, expressed in intimate private moments during the everyday action of eating together.

Guardian of the family as a concept shows how far from 'woman' is a fixed, stable identity; there are material differences between women based on how they are subject to and respond to patriarchal structures (Stanley and Wise 1993). Second-wave feminism contends that patriarchal institutions, religious or not, associate the worth of women according to their ability to reproduce (Dworkin 1983). Similarly, Mormon teachings on motherhood venerate women when they are mothers, but these values also measure LDS women by the success or failure to raise a child. In discussing her image of the Book of Mormon, Sofia considered it a religious imperative for women to teach their families about Mormonism: 'It is about creating generations. The family should be in the Church as this is what the family is all about. It is a fight when your family is not in the Church; sometimes I feel so hopeless, that I have failed in what I believe' (Sofia, 1st generation/convert, 35 years old, Greece). The implication in Church teachings that Mormon mothers have greater accountability than Mormon men for their family's religiosity sees Mormon women feel more culpable when their children no longer remain active in the Church (McBaine 2014).

Patriarchal family structures are integral to Mormon concepts of salvation (Hoyt 2007), with the prophetic endorsement of women's roles as wives and mothers and men's presiding priesthood authority leading the family (Benson 1987). In contemporary Mormon teachings, the idealised Mormon home consists of a heterosexual couple. Traditionally, Church leaders framed women as the domestic gatekeepers of the spiritual, emotional and physical norms of a family, and men as presiding authority were to provide for the family structure (Leamaster and Subramaniam 2015). Increasingly, however, Church leaders are

re-framing presiding in the home as 'nurturing children, overseeing religious training, and strengthening marriages' (Kline 2016, p. 233). Caroline Kline suggests that Church rhetoric that positions Mormon women and Mormon men as joint decision-makers in the home will create pathways to greater opportunities for equality. Kline's argument that Church-endorsed ideals of men and women as partnerships can address inequality in the home is evident in how participants in Greece understood Latter-day Saint gender roles. In a country where traditional patriarchal models were still present in apportioning domestic chores and childcare, as previously mentioned, they felt the Church offered more equal gendered roles, particularly in how American Church leaders defined the roles of maleness and masculinity. In the more gender-equal countries of Sweden and the UK, participants gender roles were in many ways indistinguishable from secular norms of gender in the domestic space. However, participants continued to accept male-only priesthood and resort to finding ways to lessen inequality without dismantling the patriarchal structure.

Studies on Christian women, Islamic women and Orthodox Jewish women show that religious women see religious piety formed in the domestic space as a source of empowerment (Gallagher 2004; Avishai 2008; Mahmood 2005). In drawing attention to the guardian of the family as a gender role, I am also reflecting on the salience of faith in European Latter-day Saint women's lives. Religion may be a prescribed dogma, but adherents can transform it into dynamic forms and beliefs, shaped by an individual's understanding of those practices and embodied through everyday social interactions (Ammerman 2014; Aune 2015; Avishai 2010; Nyhagen 2018). Therefore, Elsa considers that her faith practices are a positive affirmation of female embodiment, where she is negotiating gender trying to make sense of Mormon imperatives of divine worth: 'I believe a gospel culture allows a woman to do anything, be a mother or not, work or not, it means you can focus on the truth and good things of the gospel and not worry about what others think' (Elsa, 2nd generation, 34 years old, Sweden).

6. Conclusions

In increasingly post-Christian countries, like Sweden and Britain or, in the case of Greece, a highly religious country that is opposed to religious plurality in the public space, the orthopraxis Mormon home is using the private space to construct alternative forms of Mormon practices and gender roles. Drawing upon the innovative method of photovoice that sees participants use photos to express diverse expressions of religion and gender, the insights shared aim to contribute to the discussion on how religious women negotiate gender in the domestic space. Exploring the lived religious practices of European Latter-day Saint women, I argue that while the introduction of 'Come, Follow Me' is transformative for some participants, it is not unreasonable to suggest some participants perceive the materials as also reinforcing traditional American (Utah) Mormon gender constructs.

Offering a typology of gendered practice, sacralising of the home and gender role guardian of the family implies an essentialisation or homogenisation of European Latter-day Saint female identities. Indeed, Scott (1996) contends the paradox of feminism is that by universalising female experiences to affect change, we could be reproducing oppressive measures that we aim to eliminate. Instead, what I hope to offer are categories to allow more fluid and expansive gender constructions that can generate new ways of living a gendered or not religious life. In doing so, I aim to be evidential about how European women address being part of a Christian religious minority through everyday social interactions that make sense of their faith through embodied practices.

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